



(19)

Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 358 973 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION
published in accordance with Art. 158(3) EPC

(43) Date of publication:

(51) Int Cl.7: **B25J 19/00**, B25J 17/00,
H01R 39/00, H01R 39/12,
H01B 39/28

(21) Application number: 02716455.7

(22) Date of filing: 29.01.2002

(86) International application number:
PCT/JP02/00673

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE TR**

(87) International publication number:
WO 02/060654 (08.08.2002 Gazette 2002/32)

(30) Priority: 31.01.2001 JP 2001023629

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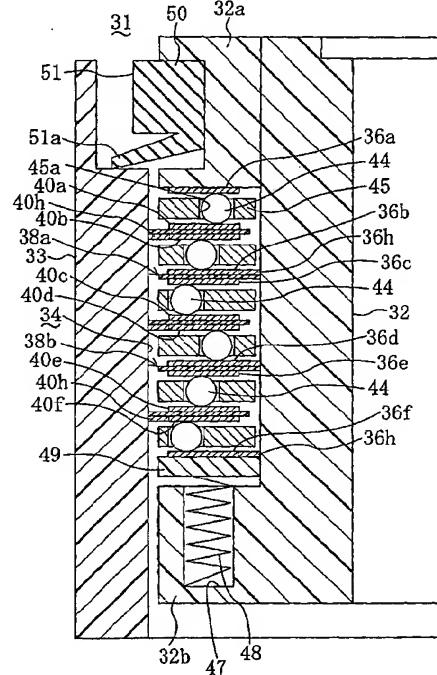
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(54) ROTARY JOINT

(57) In a rotary joint **A** including an electric signal slip ring 31 for passing different electric signals between a stator 1 and a rotor 6, for the purpose of stable transmission of electric signals in the electric signal slip ring 31, stationary side electrode stacks 38a and 38b are provided individually by stacking each pair of axially adjacent two 36b to 36e of six ring-plate-shaped stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f arranged concentrically with the axis of the stator 1 and aligned axially with each other together with one of stationary side insulating seats 37a and 37b interposed between the pair of axially faced stationary side electrodes, rotating side electrode stacks 42a to 42c are provided individually by stacking each pair of axially adjacent two 40a to 40f of six ring-plate-shaped rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f arranged concentrically with the axis of the rotor 6 and aligned axially with each other together with one of rotating side insulating seats 41a and 41c interposed between the pair of axially faced rotating side electrodes, a group of the stationary side electrode stacks 38a and 38b and another group of the rotating side electrode stacks 42a to 42c are arranged between the axially distally situated stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f so that one from one group and one from the other axially alternate and all in each group are axially aligned, and a plurality of spherical bodies 44 are disposed between each of the distally situated stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f and the electrode of the rotating side electrode stack 42a or 42c axially faced to each said distally

situated stationary side electrode **36a** or **36f** and between the faced electrodes of the axially adjacent stationary and rotating side electrode stacks to roll on the faced electrodes to pass electric signals between them.

FIG. 2



Description**Technical Field**

5 [0001] This invention relates to a rotary joint disposed, for example, at the distal end of a robot arm, and particularly relates to a technical field regarding measures for stably passing electric signals between a stator and a rotor.

Background Art

10 [0002] Conventional rotary joints of this kind have a stator fixedly mounted to, for example, the distal end of a robot arm, and a rotor fixedly mounted to a hand side of the robot and rotatably coupled and supported to the stator, and are configured to allow communication of fluid, such as air, cooling water or welding gas, and electricity for power, signals or other purposes between the stator and rotor so that communication of such fluid and electricity can be established even when the hand side of the robot rotates with respect to the stationary side thereof.

15 [0003] Furthermore, for fluid communication, the above rotary joints employ a swivel joint in which plural kinds of fluid passages are arranged between the slide surfaces of the stator and rotor. For power electricity communication, the above rotary joints employ a slip ring consisting of a collector ring mounted to one of the stator and rotor and a slide contact mounted to the other for coming into sliding contact with the collector ring to feed electricity.

20 [0004] There are also known electric signal slip rings for passing electric signals between a stator and a rotor. Proposed as an example of such electric signal slip rings is, as disclosed in Japanese Unexamined Patent Publication No. 10-223346, an electric signal slip ring which includes a stationary side electrode of ring plate shape disposed on the stator side, a rotating side electrode of ring plate shape disposed on the rotor side, and a rolling element disposed between both the electrodes, and which is configured to roll the rolling element on both the electrodes by relative rotation of the rotor to the stator to pass electric signals between both the electrodes.

25 [0005] The proposed electric signal slip ring, however, has a problem that when a plurality of stationary side electrodes and a plurality of rotating side electrodes are arranged to pass different electric signals between the stator and rotor, some or other of the electrodes may produce sliding friction to make it difficult to stably transmit electric signals between the stator and rotor.

30 [0006] Furthermore, electric signal transmission through rolling of the rolling element on the electrodes, though making the occurrence of a slip of the rolling element difficult, cannot avoid the production of wear particles. When the wear particles accumulate on the conductive surfaces after long-time use, it again becomes difficult to stably transmit electric signals.

[0007] In addition, in order to ensure stable transmission of electric signals through rolling of the rolling element, it is desirable to reduce the sliding resistance of the rolling element as much as possible.

35 [0008] The present invention has been made in view of the foregoing points, and therefore its object is to improve the structure of the electric signal slip ring in the rotary joint as described above, thereby enabling, even in passing different electric signals between the stator and rotor, stable transmission of the electric signals.

Disclosure of Invention

40 [0009] To attain the above object, the present invention, as described above, is directed to a rotary joint including a stator, a rotor rotatably coupled and supported to the stator, and an electric signal slip ring for passing different electric signals between the stator and the rotor, wherein the electric signal slip ring includes a plurality of stationary side electrodes of ring plate shape arranged concentrically with the axis of the stator and aligned axially with each other, and a plurality of rotating side electrodes of ring plate shape arranged concentrically with the axis of the rotor and aligned axially with each other.

45 [0010] Furthermore, a stationary side electrode stack is provided by stacking each pair of axially adjacent two of the plurality of stationary side electrodes with a ring-shaped stationary side insulating layer interposed between the pair of two stationary side electrodes, and a rotating side electrode stack is provided by stacking each pair of axially adjacent two of the plurality of rotating side electrodes with a ring-shaped rotating side insulating layer interposed between the pair of two rotating side electrodes. In addition, the stationary side electrode stack and the rotating side electrode stack are axially alternately arranged between a pair of end electrodes located at both axial ends of the electric signal slip ring, and a plurality of rolling elements are disposed between each of the end electrodes and the electrode of the electrode stack axially faced to each said end electrode and between the axially faced electrodes of the axially adjacent electrode stacks to roll on said two electrodes through relative rotation of the rotor to the stator to pass electric signals between said two electrodes.

50 [0011] With this structure, a stationary side electrode stack is formed of one pair of the stationary side electrodes of the plurality thereof and the stationary side insulating layer, a rotating side electrode stack is formed of one pair of the

rotating side electrodes of the plurality thereof and the rotating side insulating layer, these electrode stacks are axially alternately arranged between one pair of end electrodes located at both axial ends of the electric signal slip ring, and the plurality of rolling elements are disposed between each of the end electrodes and the electrode of the corresponding electrode stack and between the axially faced said electrodes of the axially adjacent said electrode stacks. Thus, while

5 the rotary joint has a structure in which different electric signals are passed between the stator and the rotor, the rolling elements lie between each of the stationary side electrodes and the corresponding rotating side electrode for transmitting or receiving signals from or to each said stationary side electrode, and the stationary and rotating side electrodes relatively move while rolling the plurality of rolling elements. Therefore, the occurrence of slip on the electrodes is suppressed as much as possible, thereby providing stable transmission and reception of an electric signal between

10 each of the stationary side electrodes and the corresponding rotating side electrode.

[0012] In the above rotary joint, pressing means for pressing at least one of the end electrodes towards the other end electrode may be provided. In this way, the occurrence of slip between each of the stationary side electrodes and the corresponding rotating side electrode can be suppressed with higher certainty, thereby providing more stable transmission and reception of an electric signal between both the electrodes.

15 [0013] In a rotary joint including a stator, a rotor rotatably coupled and supported to the stator, and an electric signal slip ring for passing electric signals between the stator and the rotor, an air blowing passage may be provided which has one end opening into the stator, the other end opening into the rotor and an intermediate part passing through the electric signal slip ring.

20 [0014] Alternately, in the rotary joint having the above inventive structure, an air blowing passage may be provided which has one end opening into the stator, the other end opening into the rotor and an intermediate part passing through the electric signal slip ring.

25 [0015] With these structures, even if wear particles are produced on the electric signal slip ring because of wear of the electrodes and so on, air blow into the air blowing passage through one of its ends allows the air flow to blow off the wear particles through the other end of the air blowing passage together with the blown air. Therefore, wear particles can be removed with ease, thereby providing stable transmission of electric signals between the electrodes for a long period of time.

[0016] It is desirable that the air blowing passage should include an electric wire insertion hole for inserting therein an electric wire connecting to the electric signal slip ring. In this way, air can be blown on the electric signal slip ring using the existing electric wire insertion hole, and therefore the structure of the air blowing passage can be simplified.

30 [0017] In the rotary joint having the above inventive structure, the electric signal slip ring may include an outer housing fitted to one of the stator and the rotor, and an inner housing fitted to the other of the stator and the rotor and disposed substantially concentrically in the outer housing with an annular space created between the inner and outer housings, and the stationary and rotating side electrodes may be accommodated in the annular space between both the housings. Furthermore, one of the group of stationary side electrodes and the group of rotating side electrodes may be fitted and 35 borne against the inner periphery of the outer housing with a certain clearance left between the inner peripheries of said one group of electrodes and the outer periphery of the inner housing, while the other of the group of stationary side electrodes or the group of rotating side electrodes may be fitted and borne against the outer periphery of the inner housing with a certain clearance left between the outer peripheries of said other group of electrodes and the inner periphery of the outer housing.

40 [0018] With this structure, even if the axes of the stator and rotor, i.e., the axes of the outer and inner housings of the electric signal slip ring, are misaligned relative to each other, the clearance between the inner peripheries of the electrodes fitted on the inner periphery of the outer housing and the outer periphery of the inner housing or the clearance between the outer peripheries of the electrodes fitted on the outer periphery of the inner housing and the inner periphery of the outer housing is only eliminated, which stably rolls the plurality of rolling elements between the electrodes.

45 Therefore, even if a misalignment between the axes of the stator and the rotor occurs, it can be ensured that an electric signal is stably transmitted between the stationary and rotating side electrodes.

50 [0019] In this case, raceways for rolling elements of the stationary and rotating side electrodes may be formed in flat surfaces. Thus, the plurality of rolling elements can be rolled with higher stability between the electrodes. Therefore, even if a misalignment between the axes of the stator and the rotor occurs, it can be ensured that an electric signal is transmitted with higher stability.

[0020] The rolling elements and the electrodes in the electric signal slip ring may each have a plated surface. In this way, the contact resistance between each rolling element and the adjacent electrodes can be constantly held at a small value.

Brief Description of Drawings**[0021]**

5 Figure 1 is a cross-sectional view of a rotary joint according to an embodiment of the present invention.
 Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view showing one side of an electric signal slip ring in enlarged manner.
 Figure 3 is a cross-sectional view showing the other side of the electric signal slip ring in enlarged manner.
 Figure 4 is an enlarged perspective view showing the electric signal slip ring with portions broken away.
 Figure 5 is a partly-broken, perspective view showing portions of a boss of a stator which form water passages and an air passage, respectively.
 Figure 6 is a perspective view showing the structure of a stationary electrode stack.
 Figure 7 is a perspective view showing the structure of a rotating electrode stack.
 Figure 8 is illustrations showing that the axes of housings of the electric signal slip ring are misaligned.
 Figure 9 is a cross-sectional view showing air flows when air is blown into the electric signal slip ring.
 Figure 10 is a plan view showing air flows when air is blown into the electric signal slip ring.
 Figure 11 is a top view of the rotary joint.
 Figure 12 is a front view of the rotary joint.
 Figure 13 is a bottom view of the rotary joint.

20 Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

[0022] A best mode for carrying out the present invention will be described as an embodiment with reference to the drawings.

[0023] Figures 11 to 13 show a rotary joint **A** according to an embodiment of the present invention. This rotary joint **A** is arranged so as to be fitted to the distal end of an arm of an unshown welding robot for carrying out spot welding.

[0024] The rotary joint **A** includes a stator **1** of substantially cylindrical shape mounted to an arm side of the welding robot, and a rotor **6** of substantially cylindrical shape mounted to a welding gun side (a hand side) thereof. The rotor **6** is coupled and supported for rotation with 360 degrees or more to the stator **1**.

[0025] As shown in enlarged manner in Figure 1, the stator **1** has a cylindrical boss **3** formed integrally with an outward flange **2** at the top end (the upper end in Figure 1), and a bottomed, cylindrical cover **4** that is disposed concentrically to surround the boss **3**, is secured integrally to the boss **3** and downwardly opens.

[0026] The rotor **6** includes a cylindrical shaft **7** fitted relatively rotatably into the boss **3** of the stator **1**, an upper flange **8** secured integrally on the upper end of the shaft **7** to close the opening of the cylindrical shaft **7** and located in a portion of the rotor **6** above the outward flange **2**, and a lower flange **9** secured integrally about the lower end of the shaft **7** and extending radially outwardly beyond the bottom end of the boss **3** to close the lower opening of the cover **4**.

[0027] Between the boss **3** of the stator **1** and the shaft **7** of the rotor **6**, a swivel joint **11** is provided for communicating water and air as fluids between the stator **1** and the rotor **6**. Furthermore, in a cylindrical space surrounded by the boss **3** and cover **4** of the stator **1** and the lower flange **9** of the rotor **6**, a power slip ring **21** for supplying welding power from the stator **1** to the rotor **6**, and an electric signal slip ring **31** located internally of the power slip ring **21** for passing different electric signals of plural kinds (six kinds in the example shown in the figures) between the stator **1** and the rotor **6** are fitted concentrically.

[0028] The swivel joint **11** has two water passages **12, 13** and one air passage **14**, and these three passages **12** to **14** have the same structure. Specifically, as also shown in Figure 5, the internal periphery of the boss **3** of the stator **1** is formed with three annular grooves **15, 15, ...** vertically (axially) spaced from each other. Furthermore, inside of the wall of the boss **3**, three vertical holes **16, 16, ...** (only part of them shown) extending vertically are formed through the wall and circumferentially close to each other. The lower end of each vertical hole **16** opens into the bottom surface of the corresponding annular groove **15**, while its upper end opens into the outer periphery of the outward flange **2**.

[0029] On the other hand, inside of the wall of the shaft **7** of the rotor **6**, three vertical holes **17, 17, ...** (only part of them shown) extending vertically are formed through the wall at circumferentially equally spaced positions. The upper end of each vertical hole **17** opens into the outer periphery of the shaft **7** to communicate with the corresponding annular groove **15** in the boss **3** of the stator **1**, while the lower end of each vertical hole **17** opens into the outer periphery of the shaft **7** below the lower flange **9**. The passages including upper two of the three annular grooves **15, 15, ...** formed in the inner periphery of the boss **3** of the stator **1** constitute the water passages **12** and **13**, respectively, and the passage including the lower one **15** constitutes the air passage **14**. Through these water passages **12** and **13** and air passage **14**, water and air can be communicated even between the stator **1** and the rotor **6** both relatively rotated.

[0030] Furthermore, the inner periphery of the boss **3** of the stator **1** is formed with four sealing grooves **18, 18, ...** one on each vertical (axial) side of the three annular grooves **15, 15, ...**, and each sealing groove **18** is fitted with a

rubber-made sealing ring 19 so that the inner periphery of the sealing ring 19 makes sliding contact with the outer periphery of the shaft 7 of the rotor 6 to form a seal therewith.

[0031] Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5, the opening of each vertical hole 16 in the bottom surface of the annular groove 15 in the boss 3 of the stator 1 is formed by perforating through the wall of the boss from the point on the outer periphery of the boss diametrically opposed to a portion to be opened of the bottom surface of the annular groove 15 and then making the opening in the bottom surface of the annular groove 15. The perforation of the wall is closed in air-tight manner by a plug 20 after the making of the opening.

[0032] The power slip ring 21 is provided with three collector rings 22, 22, ... concentrically arranged in the cylindrical space formed among the boss 3 and the cover 4 of the stator 1 and the lower flange 9 of the rotor 6. The collector rings 22, 22, ... are vertically stacked through individual insulating rings 23, 23, ... Each collector ring 22 is screwed on the distal end (upper end) of a collector bolt 24 that passes through the other collector rings 22 in electrically insulated manner. Each collector bolt 24 passes through the lower flange 9 of the rotor 6 in electrically insulated manner. Its head 24a at the lower end protrudes below the lower flange 9, and is connected with an end of a power cable 25 that conducts electricity to the welding gun (not shown).

[0033] Three slide contacts 26, 26, ... pass through the sidewall of the cover 4 of the stator 1 at circumferentially equally spaced and mutually neighbouring positions in electrically insulated manner, and are secured to the sidewall of the cover 4 with each covered with a cover 26a. The inner end of each slide contact 26 is pushed slidably against the outer periphery of the corresponding collector ring 22 with a predetermined pressing force. The sliding contact between each slide contact 26 and the corresponding collector ring 22 allows welding power at a large current to be transmitted even between the stator 1 and the rotor 6 both relatively rotated.

[0034] Furthermore, the electric signal slip ring 31 is provided with a cylindrical inner housing 32 fitted onto the outer periphery of the boss 3 of the stator 1, and a cylindrical outer housing 33 fitted concentrically onto the inner housing 32 with an annular space 34 created therebetween as described later. Both the housings 32 and 33 are made of resin, for example. The outer periphery of the inner housing 32 is formed at the upper and lower ends integrally with outward flanges 32a and 32b, respectively. The annular space 34 of cylindrical shape is defined so as to be surrounded by both the flanges 32a and 32b, a vertical intermediate portion of the outer periphery of the inner housing 32, and the outer housing 33.

[0035] The annular space 34 between the inner and outer housing 32 and 33 accommodates six ring-plate-shaped stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and six ring-plate-shaped rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f. Each of these electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f is made of phosphor bronze, for example, and its surface is plated with silver, for example. Preferably used as a plating material for this plating is any good conductive material having the effect of rust prevention of the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f themselves. The thickness of the plated layer is preferably small. The plated layer with a thickness of 5µm or less would be more preferable because it is less likely to be peeled off. The top and bottom surfaces of each of the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f, specifically, their raceways on which the later-described spherical bodies 44 roll, are formed in flat surfaces.

[0036] As shown in detail and enlarged manner in Figures 2 and 3, the six stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f are arranged concentrically with the axis of the stator 1 and aligned axially or vertically with each other, while the six rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f are likewise arranged concentrically with the axis of the rotor 6 and aligned axially or vertically with each other.

[0037] Among the six stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f, two electrodes 36a and 36f located at the upper and lower ends (axial ends) are end electrodes. For the four stationary side electrodes 36b to 36e exclusive of the two stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f as end electrodes, as also shown in Figure 6, the one pair of axially adjacent stationary side electrodes 36b and 36c are stacked with a ring-shaped stationary side insulating seat 37a interposed therebetween, and the other pair of axially adjacent stationary side electrodes 36d and 36e are stacked with a ring-shaped stationary side insulating seat 37b interposed therebetween. The one pair of electrodes 36b and 36c and the other pair of electrodes 36d and 36e form two individual stationary side electrode stacks 38a and 38b with the stationary side insulating seats 37a and 37b, respectively.

[0038] On the other hand, for the six rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f, as also shown in Figure 7, the one pair of axially adjacent rotating side electrodes 40a and 40b are stacked with a ring-shaped rotating side insulating seat 41a interposed therebetween, the second pair of axially adjacent rotating side electrodes 40c and 40d are stacked with a ring-shaped rotating side insulating seat 41b interposed therebetween, and the third pair of axially adjacent rotating side electrodes 40e and 40f are stacked with a ring-shaped rotating side insulating seat 41c interposed therebetween. The one pair of electrodes 40a and 40b, the second pair of electrodes 40c and 40d, and the third pair of electrodes 40e and 40f form three individual rotating side electrode stacks 42a to 42c with the rotating side insulating seats 41a to 41c, respectively.

[0039] A group of the two stationary side electrode stacks 38a and 38b and another group of the three rotating side electrode stacks 42a to 42c are arranged between the stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f as a pair of end electrodes located at axial ends of the electric signal slip ring 31 so that one from one group and one from the other alternate

axially or vertically and all in each group are axially aligned.

[0040] Furthermore, between each of the stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f as the end electrodes and an axially faced one of the rotating side electrodes 40a and 40f of the rotating side electrode stacks 42a and 42c, and between each faced two of the stationary and rotating side electrodes 36b to 36e and 40b to 40e of the axially adjacent stationary and rotating side electrode stacks 38a, 38b and 42a to 42c, spherical bodies 44 of steel balls are interposed which serve as rolling elements for rolling on each faced two of these electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f through rotation of the rotor 6 relative to the stator 1 to pass electric signals between the faced two of the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f. As shown in Figure 4, the plurality of spherical bodies 44 are disposed circumferentially at regular intervals between each faced two of the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f. Each of the spherical bodies 44, 44, ... is received and held in a corresponding one of retaining holes 45a in a ring-plate-shaped retainer 45 located between each faced two of the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f. Each spherical body 44 is formed of, for example, a steel ball obtained by quenching carbon steel, and its surface is plated with silver, for example. Plating materials used for plating the spherical body 44 are desirably good conductive materials having the effect of rust prevention of the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f themselves.

[0041] The lower flange 32b of the inner housing 32 is formed at the top surface with an annular spring groove 47, and the spring groove 47 accommodates a spring 48 as a pressing means for pressing the stationary side electrode 36f as the lower end electrode toward the stationary side electrode 36a as the upper end electrode. A ring-plate-shaped insulator 49 is interposed between the stationary side electrode 36f as the lower end electrode and the spring 48 so that the spring 48 presses the electrode 36f through the insulator 49.

[0042] The upper flange 32a of the inner housing 32 is formed at the outer periphery with an annular packing groove 50, and the packing groove 50 accommodates a rubber-made packing 51 of substantially V-shaped section having a lip 51a with the lip 51a pressing against the top surface of the outer housing 33. The packing 51 provides a seal between the upper ends of both the housings 32 and 33.

[0043] A portion of the inner housing 32 located toward the stator 1 is formed with a rectangular, bottomed hole 53 opening into the top surface of the inner housing 32. The outer periphery of the cover 4 of the stator 1 is mounted integrally with a connector fitting part 55 having a threaded hole 54, and a stationary side connector 56 is secured to the threaded hole 54 by screw-threaded engagement. The threaded hole 54 of the connector fitting part 55 is communicated with the bottomed hole 53 of the inner housing 32 via a through hole 57 formed in the cover 4. Furthermore, as also shown in Figure 6, the inner peripheries of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f are provided with connection terminals 36g to extend to lie within the bottomed hole 53 of the inner housing 32, respectively. The connection terminals 36g are securely connected with one ends of stationary side electric wires 58, respectively. These six stationary side electric wires 58, 58, ... run through the bottomed hole 53, the through hole 57 of the cover 4 and the threaded hole 54 of the connector fitting part 55, and are then connected at their other ends with the stationary side connector 56.

[0044] On the other hand, a portion of the outer housing 33 located toward the rotor 6 is formed at the outer periphery with a cutaway 63 formed by cutting away part of the outer housing 33 in a rectangular shape from the bottom surface. The outer periphery of the lower flange 9 of the rotor 6 is mounted integrally with a connector fitting part 65 having a threaded hole 64, and a rotating side connector 66 is secured to the threaded hole 64 by screw-threaded engagement. The threaded hole 64 is communicated with the cutaway 63 of the outer housing 33 via a through hole 67 formed in the lower flange 9. Furthermore, as also shown in Figure 7, the outer peripheries of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f are provided with connection terminals 40g to extend to lie within the cutaway 63 of the outer housing 33, respectively. The connection terminals 40g are securely connected with one ends of rotating side electric wires 68, respectively. These six rotating side electric wires 68, 68, ... run through the cutaway 63, the through hole 67 of the lower flange 9 and the threaded hole 64 of the connector fitting part 65, and are then connected at their other ends with the rotating side connector 66.

[0045] By conducting electricity between the individual stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the faced individual rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f via the spherical bodies 44, six kinds of electric signals are passed even between the stator 1 and the rotor 6 both relatively rotated, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Signal	Stator side (Inner housing)	Spheric body	Rotor side (Outer housing)
1	Stationary side electrode 36a		
		44	
			Rotating side electrode 40a
			Rotating side insulating seat 41a

Table 1 (continued)

Signal	Stator side (Inner housing)	Spheric body	Rotor side (Outer housing)
5	2		Rotating side electrode 40b
		44	
		Stationary side electrode 36b	
10	3	Stationary side insulating seat 37a	
		Stationary side electrode 36c	
		44	
15	4		Rotating side electrode 40c
			Rotating side insulating seat 41b
		44	Rotating side electrode 40d
20	5	Stationary side electrode 36d	
		Stationary side insulating seat 37b	
		Stationary side electrode 36e	
25	6	44	
			Rotating side electrode 40e
			Rotating side insulating seat 41c
30	6	44	Rotating side electrode 40f
		Stationary side electrode 36f	

[0046] Furthermore, as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 6, the outer periphery of each of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f has a circular shape, while the inner periphery thereof is provided with a plurality of (five in the example shown) abutments 36h, 36h, ... extending inwardly at positions circumferentially equally spaced from each other. The stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f are fitted and borne against the outer periphery of the inner housing 32 with the abutments 36h, 36h, ... registering against it. A certain clearance is left between the outer peripheries of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the inner periphery of the outer housing 33.

[0047] On the other hand, as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 7, the inner periphery of each of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f has a circular shape, while the outer periphery thereof is provided with a plurality of (five in the example shown) abutments 40h, 40h, ... extending outwardly at positions spaced circumferentially equally from each other. The rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f are fitted and borne against the inner periphery of the outer housing 33 with the abutments 40h, 40h, ... registering against it. A certain clearance is left between the inner peripheries of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f and the outer periphery of the inner housing 32.

[0048] Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, the side surface of the connector fitting part 55 which is mounted on the outer periphery of the outward flange 2 of the stator 1 is formed with an air blowing hole 59 communicating with the threaded hole 54 inside thereof. The side surface of the connector fitting part 65 which is mounted on the outer periphery of the lower flange 9 of the rotor 6 is formed with an air blowing hole 69 communicating with the threaded hole 64 inside thereof. The air blowing hole 59 in the side surface of the connector fitting part 55 toward the stator 1, the threaded hole 54 inside thereof, the through hole 57 of the cover 4, the bottomed hole 53 of the inner housing 32 and the cutaway 63 of the outer housing 33 of the electric signal slip ring 31, the through hole 67 of the lower flange 9 of the rotor 6, the threaded hole 64 of the connector fitting part 65, and the air blowing hole 69 in the side surface thereof form an air blowing passage 61 one end of which opens into the stator 1 at the air blowing hole 59 in the connector fitting part 55 and the other end of which opens into the rotor 6 at the air blowing hole 69 in the connector fitting part 65. The intermediate zones of the air blowing passage 61 are in communication through the ways among the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f in the electric signal slip ring 31. For this purpose, the air blowing passage 61 is constituted by including the electric wire insertion holes for inserting therein the electric wires

58 and 68 connecting to the electric signal slip ring 31.

[0049] In this way, as shown in Figures 9 and 10, when compressed air is blown in through the air blowing hole 59 in the side surface of the connector fitting part 55 toward the stator 1 while the stator 1 and the rotor 6 are relatively rotated, the air is supplied to the bottomed hole 53 of the inner housing 32 of the electric signal slip ring 31 and split from the bottomed hole 53 into both circumferential sides, and these two split air flows are merged into a single flow at the cutaway 63 of the outer housing 33 and then blown out through the air blowing hole 69 in the side surface of the connector fitting part 65 of the rotator 6. On the contrary, when compressed air is blown in through the air blowing hole 69 in the side surface of the connector fitting part 65 toward the rotor 6, the air is run through the air blowing hole 61 in the reverse direction and blows out through the air blowing hole 59 in the side surface of the connector fitting part 55 toward the stator 1.

[0050] Therefore, according to this embodiment, when the rotor 6 is rotating relative to the stator 1 during operation of the welding robot for welding work with the welding gun, water and air are passed between the stator 1 and the rotor 6 through the two water passages 12 and 13 and the air passage 14 in the swivel joint 11. Furthermore, in the power slip ring 21, the slide contacts 26, 26, ... on the stator 1 side comes into sliding contact with the collector rings 22, 22, ... on the rotor 6 side, respectively, so that welding power at a large current is supplied from the stator 1 side to the rotor 6 side.

[0051] Furthermore, through the electric signal slip ring 31, six kinds of electric signals are passed between the stator 1 and the rotor 6. In this connection, in the electric signal slip ring 31, two stationary side electrode stacks 38a and 38b are formed individually by each pair of two of the four stationary side electrodes 36b to 36e excluding the end electrodes from the six stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and one of the stationary side insulating seats 37a and 37b, and three rotating side electrode stacks 42a to 42c are formed individually by each pair of two of the six rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f and one of the rotating side insulating seats 41a to 41c. The electrode stacks 38a and 38b and the electrode stacks 42a to 42c are alternately arranged between the stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f which are the end electrodes. Between each of the stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f as the end electrodes and a corresponding one of the rotating side electrodes 40a and 40f of the rotating side electrode stacks 38a and 38b, and between each faced two of the stationary and rotating side electrodes 36b to 36e and 40b to 40e of the axially adjacent stationary and rotating side electrode stacks 38a, 38b and 42a to 42c, the plurality of spherical bodies 44, 44, ... are interposed. Thus, the spherical bodies 44, 44, ... lie between each of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and a corresponding one of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f for transmitting or receiving signals from or to each said stationary side electrode, and the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f relatively move while rolling the spherical bodies 44, 44, In this way, the rotary joint has a structure in which six different electric signals are passed between the stator 1 and the rotor 6, and at the same time suppresses the occurrence of slip on the electrodes as much as possible. This provides stable transmission and reception of an electric signal between each of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the corresponding one of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f.

[0052] Furthermore, the stationary side electrode 36f as the lower end electrode is pressed toward the stationary side electrode 36a as the upper end electrode by the spring 48 so that the stationary side electrodes 36b to 36e and the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f are sandwiched between the end electrodes (stationary side electrodes 36a and 36f) to press them against the spherical bodies 44, 44, Therefore, the occurrence of slip between each of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the corresponding one of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f can be suppressed with higher certainty, thereby providing more stable transmission reception of an electric signal between each of the electrodes 36a to 36f and the corresponding one of the electrodes 40a to 40f.

[0053] Furthermore, the surfaces of the spherical bodies 44, 44, ... and the electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f are plated with silver or other materials. Therefore, the contact resistance between each spherical body 44 and the adjacent electrodes 36a to 36f and 40a to 40f can be constantly held at a small value.

[0054] Moreover, the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f are fitted and borne against the outer periphery of the inner housing 32 with the abutments 36h, 36h, ... registering against it, and a certain clearance is left between the outer peripheries of the stationary side electrodes 36a to 36f and the inner periphery of the outer housing 33. On the other hand, the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f are fitted and borne against the inner periphery of the outer housing 33 with the abutments 40h, 40h, ... registering against it, and a certain clearance is left between the inner peripheries of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f and the outer periphery of the inner housing 32. Thus, even if the alignment of the axis of the outer housing 33 of the electric signal slip ring 31 with the axis of the inner housing 32 thereof, as shown in Figure 8A, is disturbed during rotation of the rotor 6, for example, even if the axis of the outer housing 33 on the rotor 6 side is displaced, as shown in Figure 8B, in one direction (leftwards in the figure) relative to the axis of the inner housing 32 on the stator 1 side, the inner peripheries of the rotating side electrodes 40a to 40f fitted on the inner periphery of the outer housing 33 only abut against the outer periphery of the inner housing 32 to eliminate the clearance therebetween. On the contrary, even if the axis of the outer housing 33 is displaced, as shown in Figure 8C, in the other direction (rightwards in the figure) relative to the axis of the inner housing 32, the outer peripheries of the stationary

side electrodes **36a** to **36f** fitted on the outer periphery of the inner housing **32** only abut against the inner periphery of the outer housing **33** to eliminate the clearance therebetween. Therefore, even if a misalignment between the axes of the stator **1** and the rotor **6** occurs, each spherical body **44** can be rolled stably between each faced two of the electrodes **36a** to **36f** and the electrodes **40a** to **40f** to ensure transmission of an electric signal therebetween.

[0055] In addition, since the raceways for spherical bodies **44** of the electrodes **36a** to **36f** and **40a** to **40f** are formed in flat surfaces, the plurality of spherical bodies **44**, **44**, ... can be rolled with higher stability between each faced two of the electrodes **36a** to **36f** and the electrodes **40a** to **40f**. Therefore, even if a misalignment between the axes of the stator **1** and the rotor **6** occurs, it can be ensured that an electric signal is transmitted with higher stability.

[0056] Furthermore, the air blowing passage **61** is formed by the air blowing hole **59** in the side surface of the connector fitting part **55** toward the stator **1**, the threaded hole **54** inside thereof, the through hole **57** of the cover **4**, the bottomed hole **53** of the inner housing **32** and the cutaway **63** of the outer housing **33** of the electric signal slip ring **31**, the through hole **67** of the lower flange **9** of the rotor **6**, the threaded hole **64** of the connector fitting part **65**, and the air blowing hole **69** in the side surface thereof. Therefore, as shown in Figures **9** and **10**, there can be periodically carried out the operation of blowing compressed air into, for example, the air blowing hole **59** in the side surface of the connector fitting part **55** toward the stator **1** while relatively rotating the stator **1** and the rotor **6** (preferably, two turns or more), supplying the air into the bottomed hole **53** of the inner housing **32** of the electric signal slip ring **31** to split it from the bottomed hole **53** into both circumferential sides, merging both the air flows into a single flow at the cutaway **63** of the outer housing **33**, and then blowing out the air flow through the air blowing hole **69** in the side surface of the connector fitting part **65** of the rotator **6**, and subsequently the operation of blowing compressed air, in reverse, into the air blowing hole **69** in the side surface of the connector fitting part **65** of the rotator **6** while likewise relatively rotating the stator **1** and the rotor **6**, running the air through the air blowing hole **61** in the reverse direction, and then blowing out the air through the air blowing hole **59** in the side surface of the connector fitting part **55** toward the stator **1** (these operations may be carried out in the reverse order). Thus, even if wear particles are produced on the electric signal slip ring **31** because of wear of the electrodes **36a** to **36f** and **40a** to **40f**, the air flow through the air blowing passage **61** can blow off the wear particles together with the blown air to the outside of the housings **32** and **33** (rotary joint **A**). Therefore, wear particles can be removed with ease, thereby providing stable transmission of electric signals between each faced two of the electrodes **36a** to **36f** and **40a** to **40f** for a long period of time.

[0057] Also, in this case, the air blowing passage **61** is constituted by including the electric wire insertion holes for inserting therein the electric wires **58** and **68** connecting to the electric signal slip ring **31**. Thus, air can be blown on the electric signal slip ring **31** using the existing electric wire insertion holes, and therefore the structure of the air blowing passage **61** can be simplified. Alternatively, the air blowing passage **61** may be provided separately without using the existing electric wire insertion holes. However, the combination of the air blowing passage with the electric wire insertion holes as described above is desirable because its structure can be simplified.

35 Industrial Applicability

[0058] According to the present invention, in a rotary joint including an electric signal slip ring for passing different electric signals between a stator and a rotor, a stationary side electrode stack is provided on the stator side by interposing a ring-shaped stationary side insulating layer between each pair of axially adjacent ring-plate-shaped stationary side electrodes, while a rotating side electrode stack is provided on the rotor side by interposing a ring-shaped rotating side insulating layer between each pair of axially adjacent ring-plate-shaped rotating side electrodes. The stationary side electrode stack and the rotating side electrode stack are axially alternately arranged between a pair of end electrodes located at both axial ends of the electric signal slip ring, and a plurality of rolling elements are disposed between the axially faced two of the electrodes, thereby passing electric signals between the faced electrodes. Therefore, the present invention has a high industrial applicability in that the occurrence of slip on the electrodes is suppressed as much as possible through the rolling of rolling elements between the faced electrodes, thereby providing stable transmission and reception of an electric signal between the faced stationary and rotating side electrodes and in turn improving the reliability of the rotary joint.

50 Claims

1. A rotary joint including a stator, a rotor rotatably coupled and supported to the stator, and an electric signal slip ring for passing different electric signals between the stator and the rotor, **characterised in that**
55 the electric signal slip ring includes a plurality of stationary side electrodes of ring plate shape arranged concentrically with the axis of the stator and aligned axially with each other, and a plurality of rotating side electrodes of ring plate shape arranged concentrically with the axis of the rotor and aligned axially with each other,
a stationary side electrode stack is provided by stacking each pair of axially adjacent two of the plurality of

stationary side electrodes with a ring-shaped stationary side insulating layer interposed between the pair of two stationary side electrodes,

5 a rotating side electrode stack is provided by stacking each pair of axially adjacent two of the plurality of rotating side electrodes with a ring-shaped rotating side insulating layer interposed between the pair of two rotating side electrodes,

the stationary side electrode stack and the rotating side electrode stack are axially alternately arranged between a pair of end electrodes located at both axial ends of the electric signal slip ring, and

10 a plurality of rolling elements are disposed between each of the end electrodes and the electrode of the electrode stack axially faced to each said end electrode and between the axially faced electrodes of the axially adjacent electrode stacks to roll on said two electrodes through relative rotation of the rotor to the stator to pass electric signals between said two electrodes.

2. The rotary joint of claim 1, **characterised by** further comprising pressing means for pressing at least one of the end electrodes towards the other end electrode.

15 3. A rotary joint including a stator, a rotor rotatably coupled and supported to the stator, and an electric signal slip ring for passing electric signals between the stator and the rotor, **characterised in that**

an air blowing passage is provided which has one end opening into the stator, the other end opening into the rotor and an intermediate part passing through the electric signal slip ring.

20 4. The rotary joint of claim 1 or 2, **characterised in that** an air blowing passage is provided which has one end opening into the stator, the other end opening into the rotor and an intermediate part passing through the electric signal slip ring.

25 5. The rotary joint of claim 3 or 4, **characterised in that** the air blowing passage includes an electric wire insertion hole for inserting therein an electric wire connecting to the electric signal slip ring.

6. The rotary joint of claim 1 or 2, **characterised in that**

30 the electric signal slip ring includes an outer housing fitted to one of the stator and the rotor, and an inner housing fitted to the other of the stator and the rotor and disposed substantially concentrically in the outer housing with an annular space created between the inner and outer housings,

the stationary and rotating side electrodes are accommodated in the annular space between both the housings,

35 one of the group of stationary side electrodes and the group of rotating side electrodes are fitted and borne against the inner periphery of the outer housing with a certain clearance left between the inner peripheries of said one group of electrodes and the outer periphery of the inner housing, and

the other of the group of stationary side electrodes or the group of rotating side electrodes are fitted and borne against the outer periphery of the inner housing with a certain clearance left between the outer peripheries of said other group of electrodes and the inner periphery of the outer housing.

40 7. The rotary joint of claim 6, **characterised in that** raceways of the stationary and rotating side electrodes on which the rolling elements rolls are formed in flat surfaces.

45 8. The rotary joint of claim 1 or 2, **characterised in that** the surfaces of the rolling elements and the electrodes are plated.

FIG. 1

A

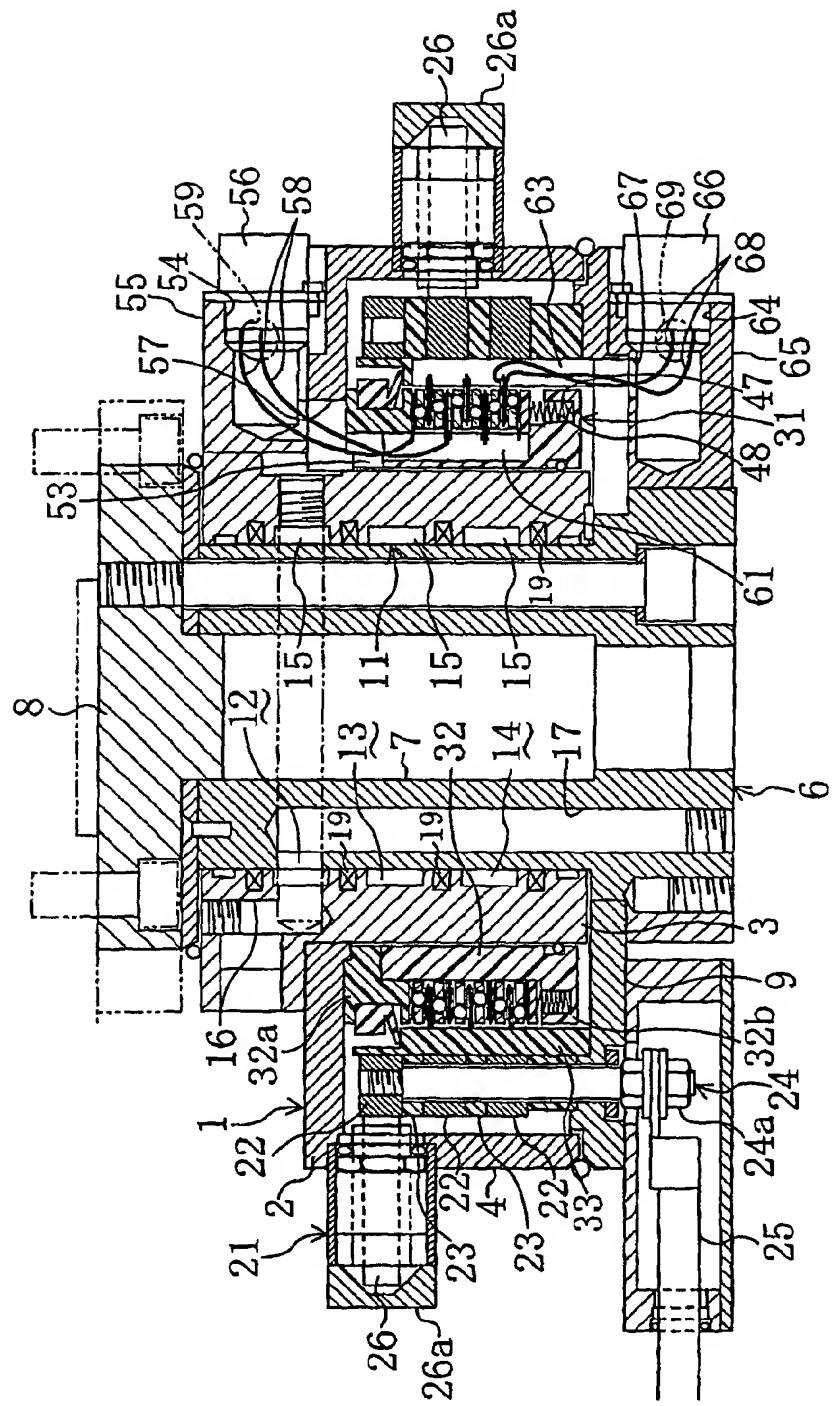


FIG. 2

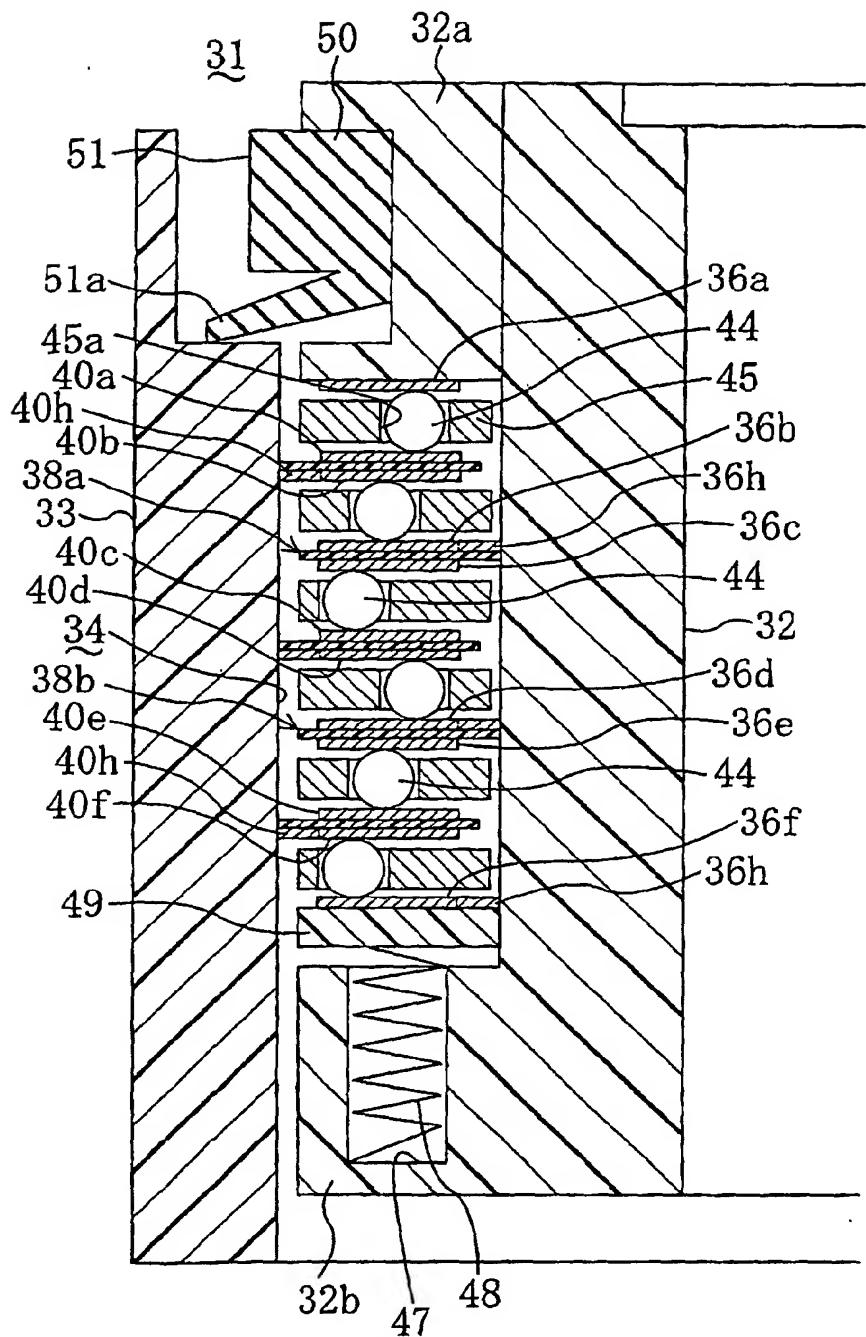


FIG. 3

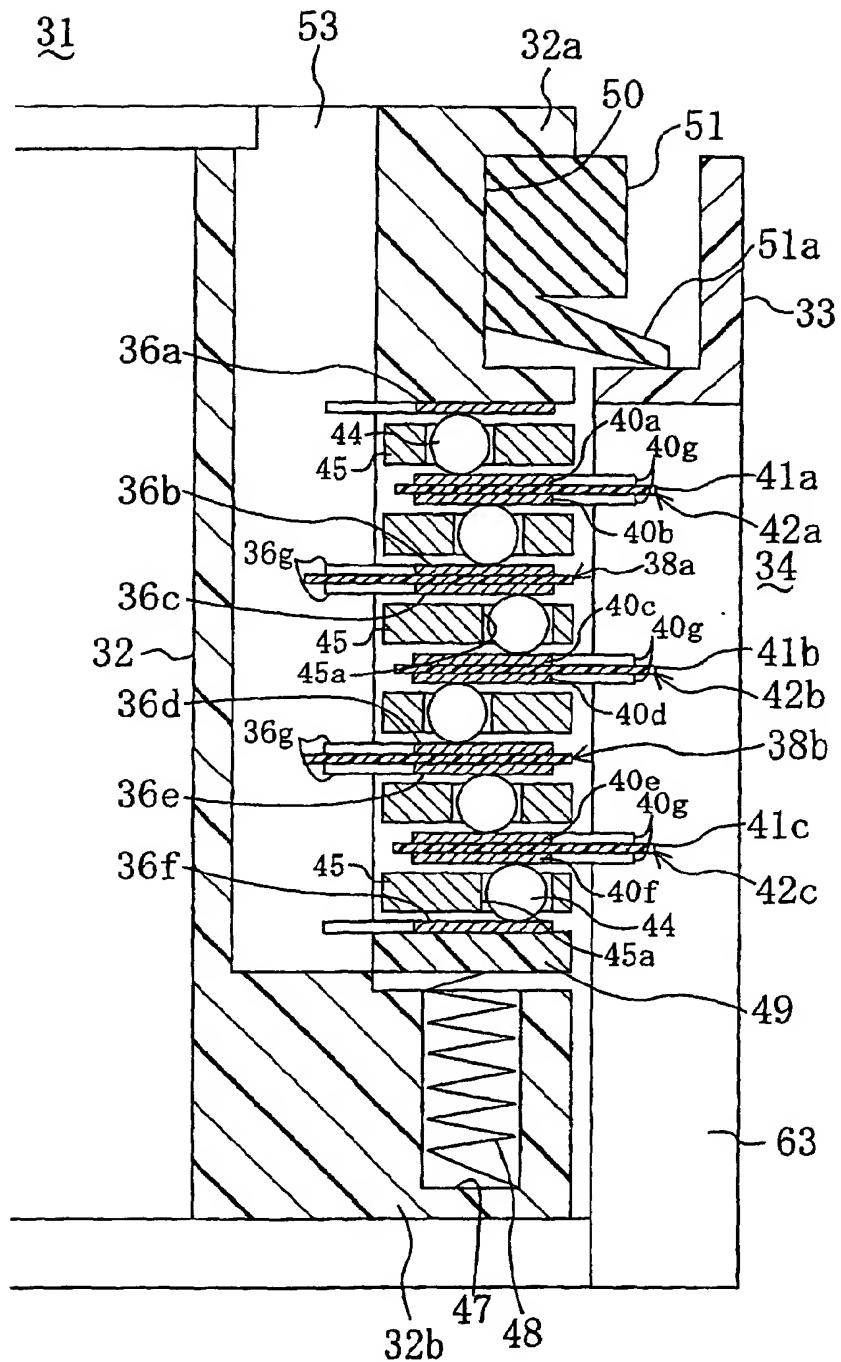


FIG. 4

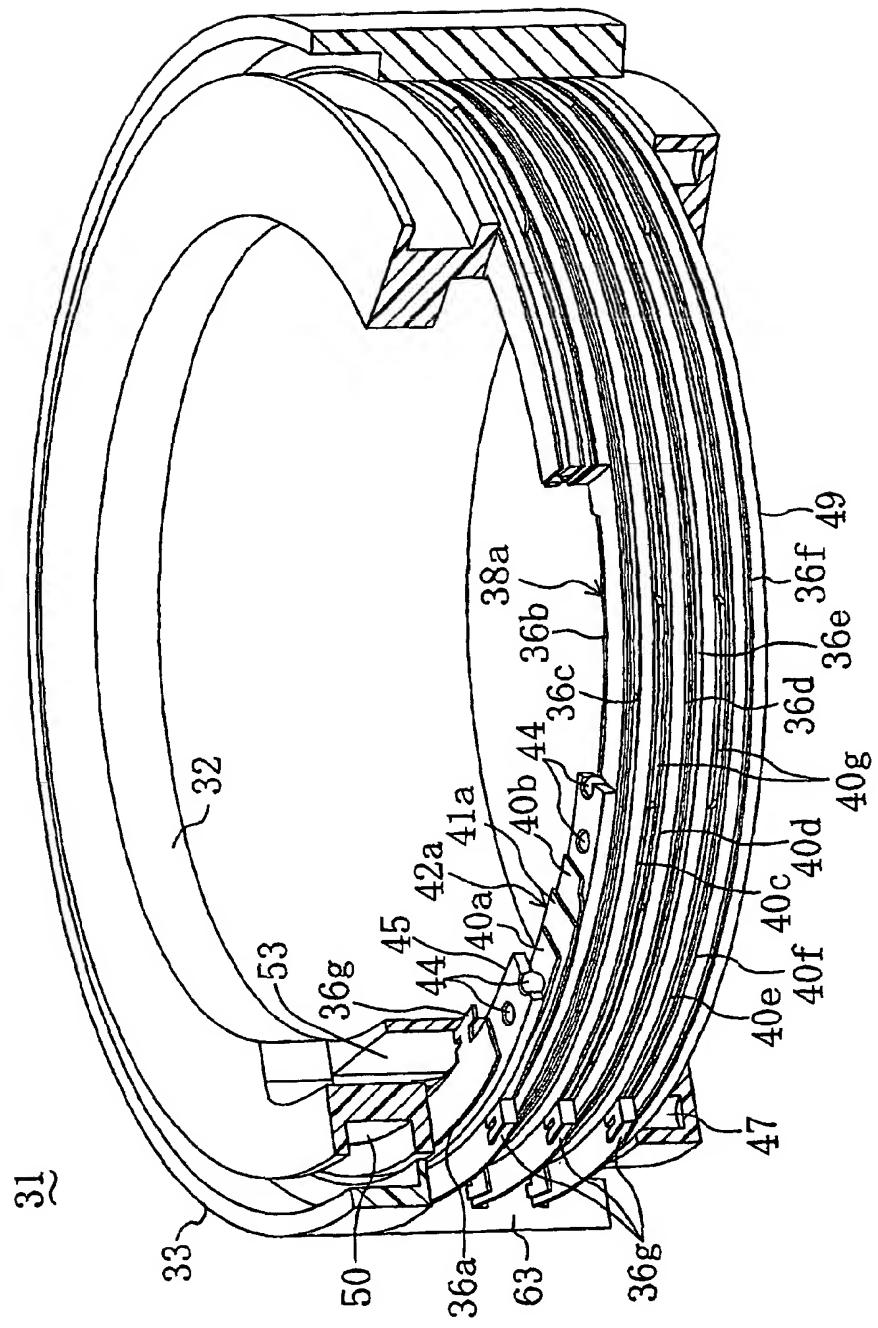


FIG. 5

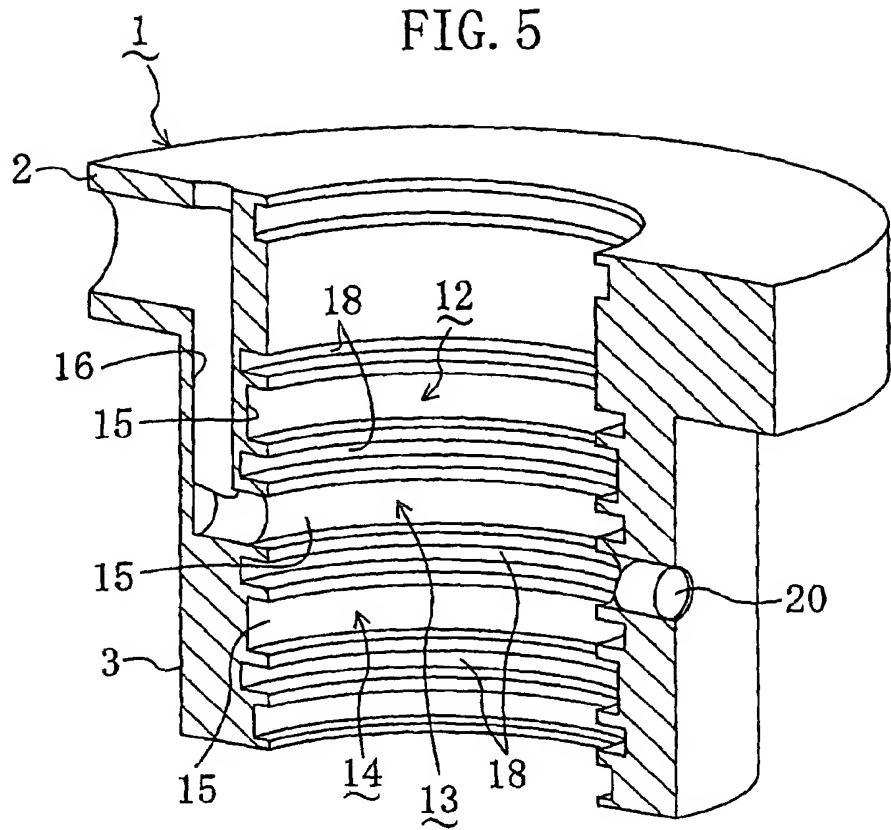


FIG. 6

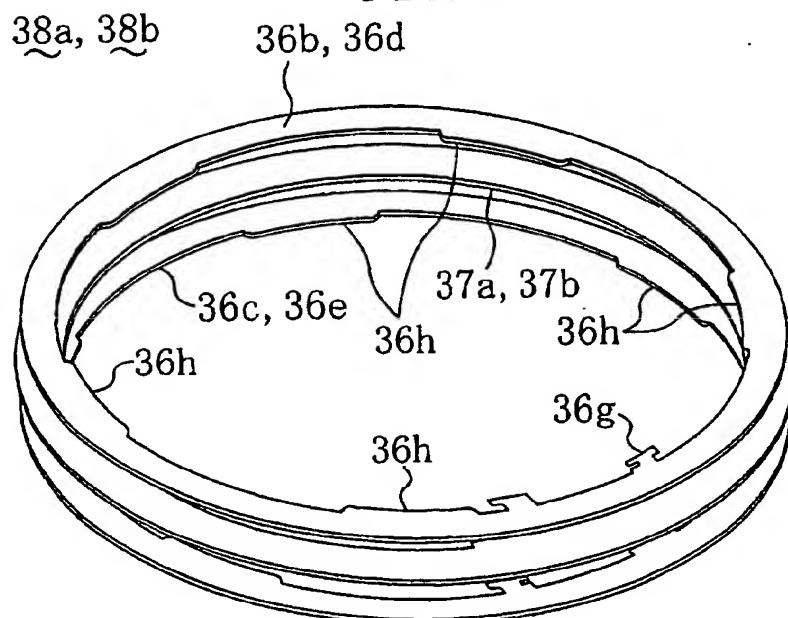


FIG. 7

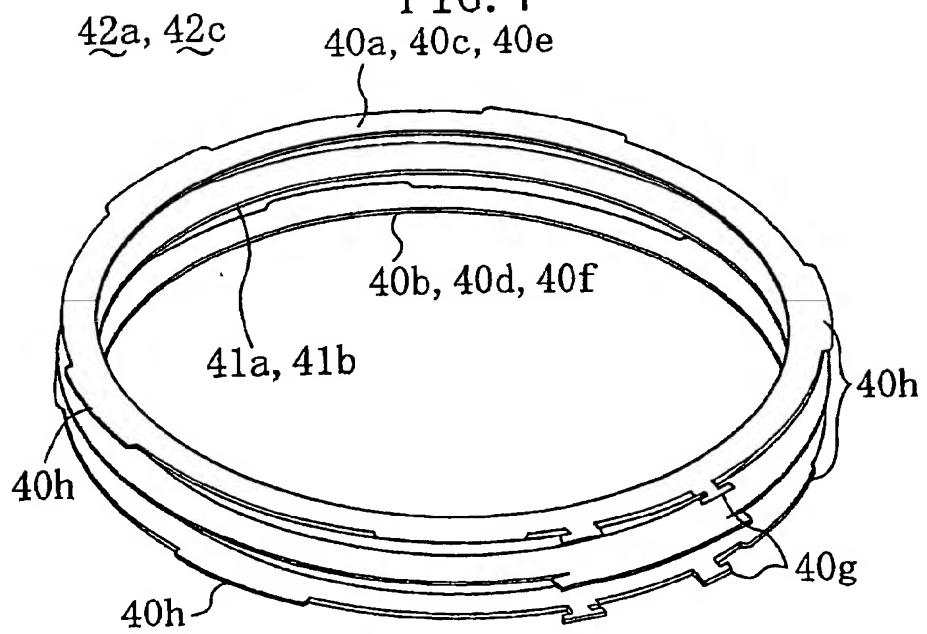


FIG. 8A

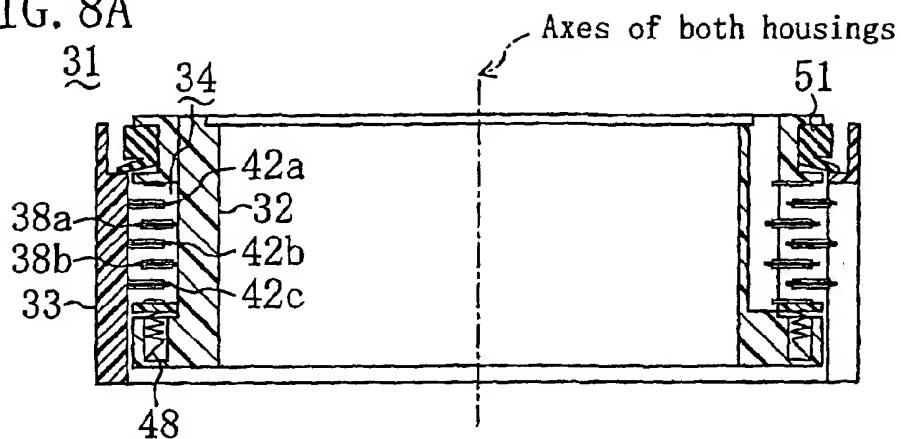


FIG. 8B

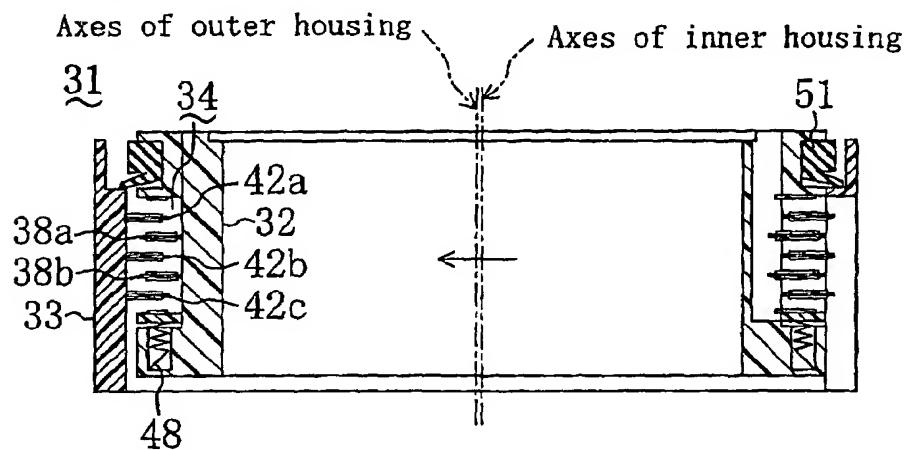
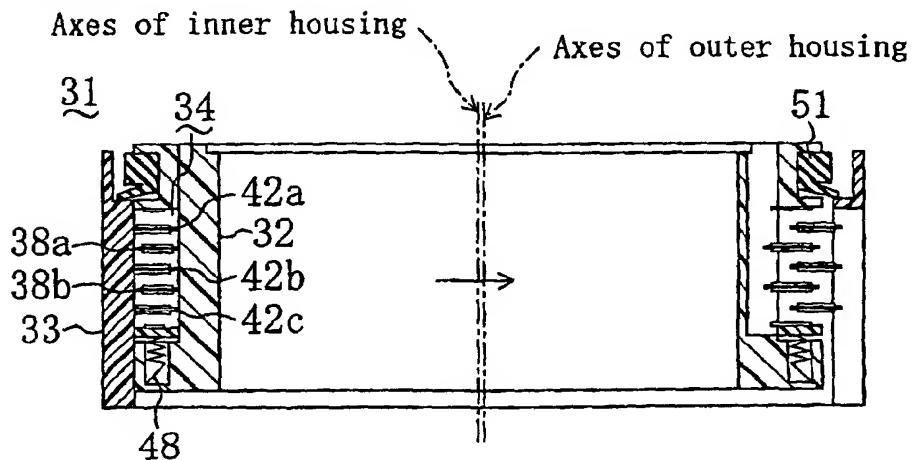


FIG. 8C



31

FIG. 9

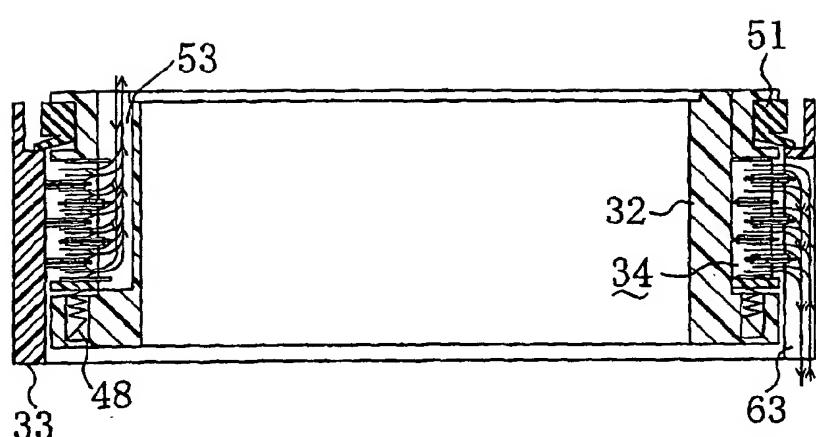


FIG. 10

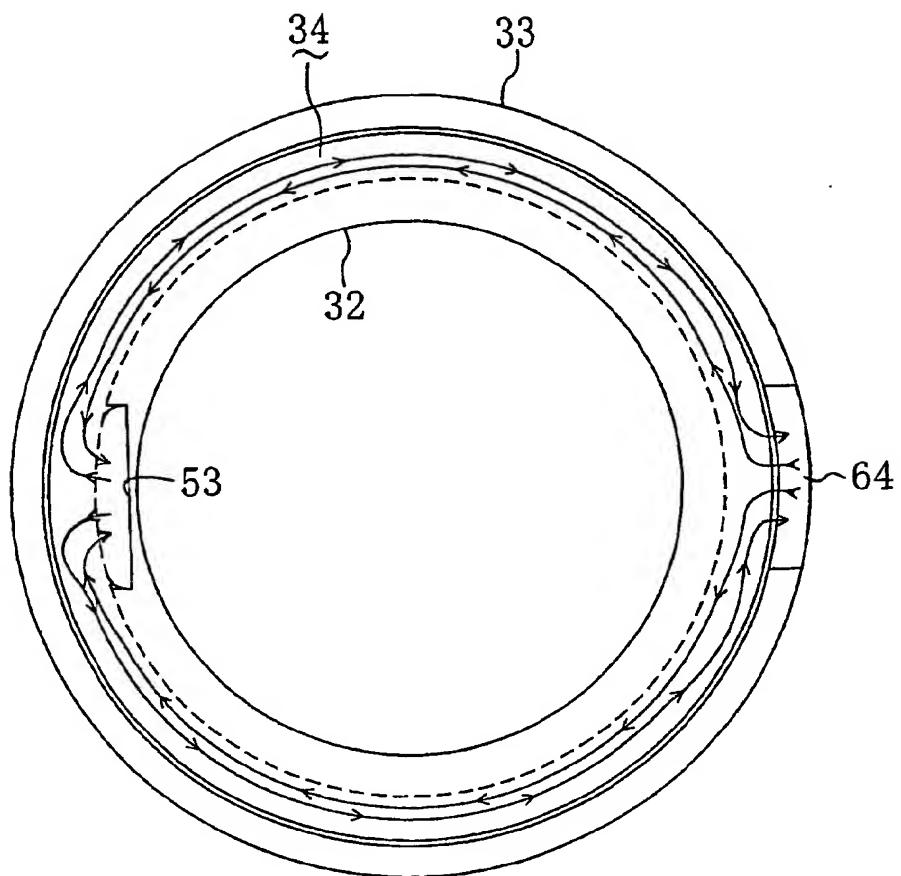


FIG. 11

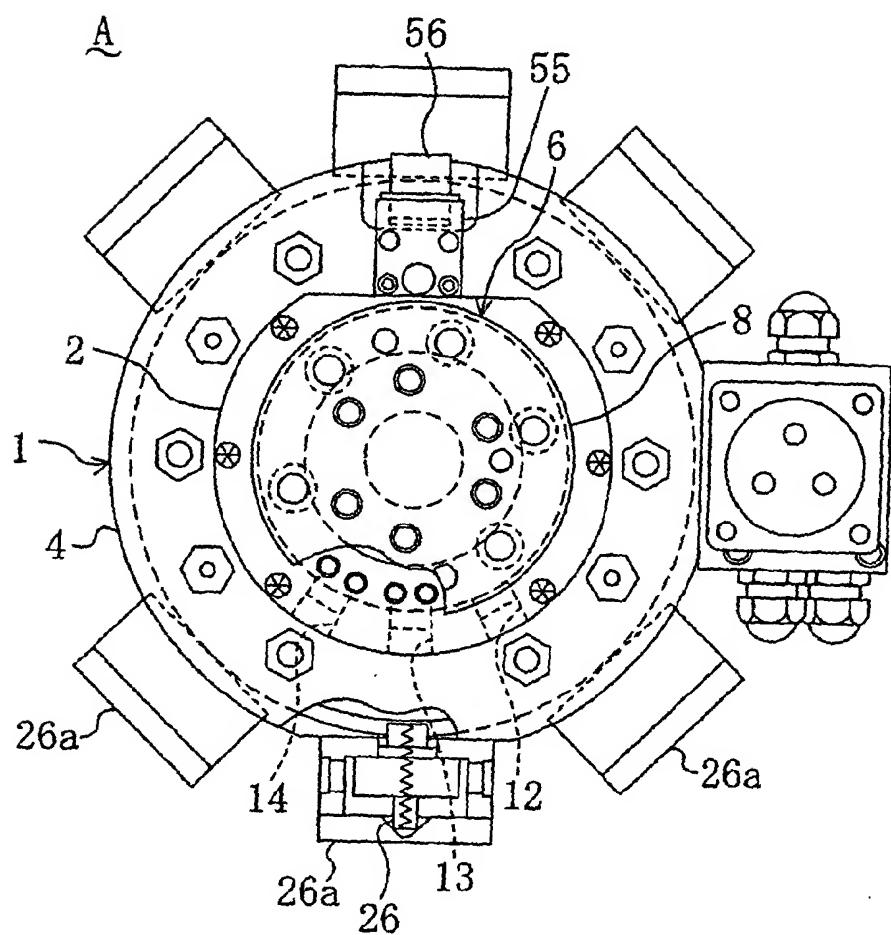


FIG. 12

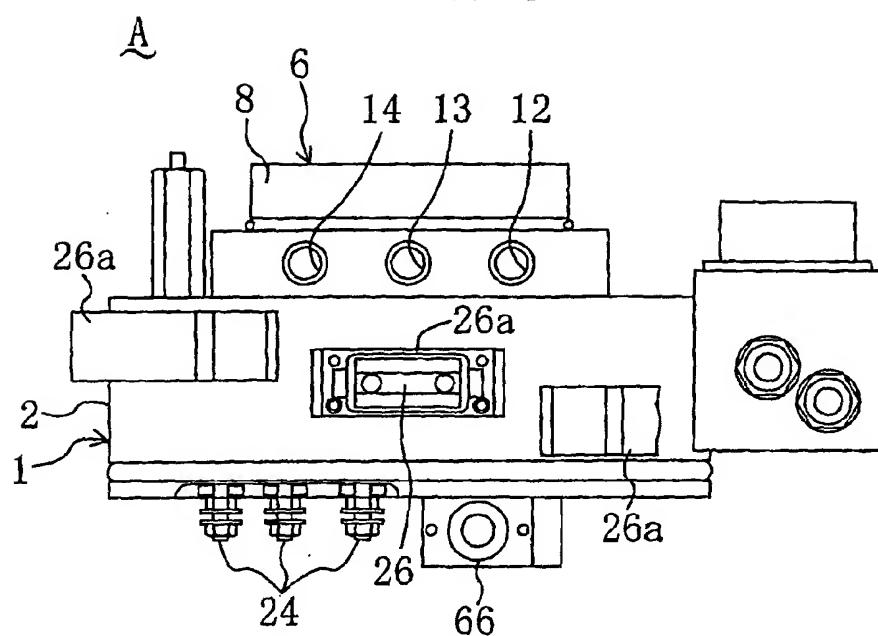
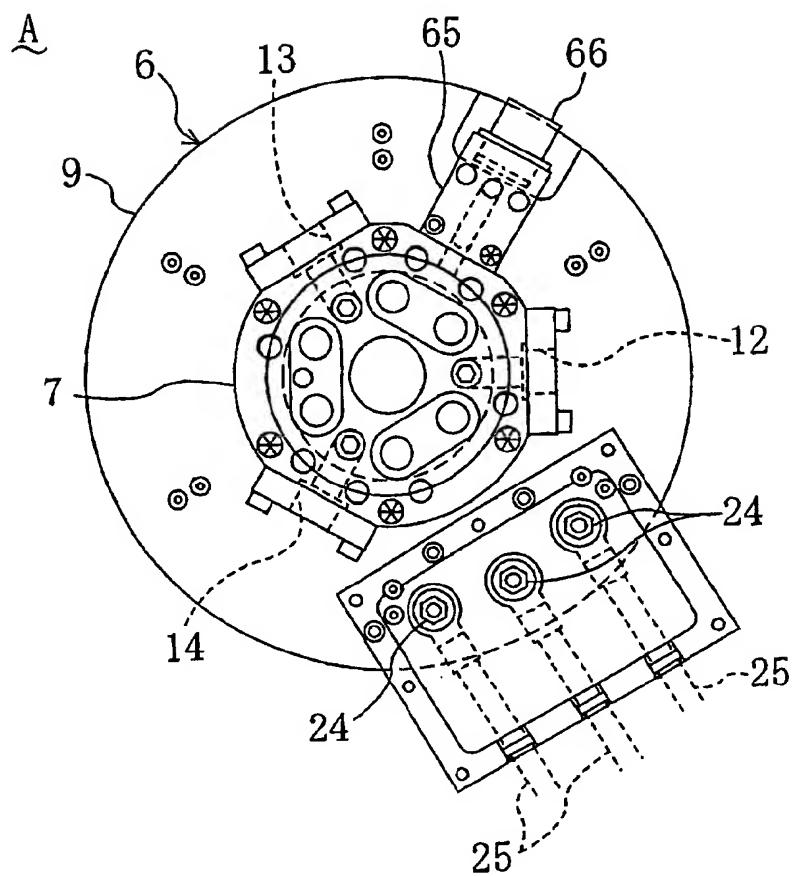


FIG. 13



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT		International application No. PCT/JP02/00673												
A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER Int.Cl' B25J19/00, B25J17/00, H01R39/00, H01R39/12, H01R39/28														
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC														
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) Int.Cl' B25J19/00, B25J17/00, H01R39/00, H01R39/12, H01R39/28														
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1926-1996 Jitsuyo Shinan Toroku Koho 1996-2002 Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971-2002 Toroku Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1994-2002														
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)														
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Category*</th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;">Relevant to claim No.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">A</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">JP 5-138580 A (Fanuc Ltd.), 01 June, 1993 (01.06.93), Par. No. [0010]; Fig. 1 (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">1-8</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">A</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">JP 2000-158376 A (BL Ototekku Kabushiki Kaisha), 13 June, 2000 (13.06.00), Claims; Fig. 2 (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">1-8</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">X A</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">JP 5-266957 A (Hitachi Medical Corp.), 15 October, 1993 (15.10.93), Page 3, column 3, lines 2 to 49; Fig. 2 (Family: none)</td> <td style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">3,5 1,2,4,6-8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.	A	JP 5-138580 A (Fanuc Ltd.), 01 June, 1993 (01.06.93), Par. No. [0010]; Fig. 1 (Family: none)	1-8	A	JP 2000-158376 A (BL Ototekku Kabushiki Kaisha), 13 June, 2000 (13.06.00), Claims; Fig. 2 (Family: none)	1-8	X A	JP 5-266957 A (Hitachi Medical Corp.), 15 October, 1993 (15.10.93), Page 3, column 3, lines 2 to 49; Fig. 2 (Family: none)	3,5 1,2,4,6-8
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A	JP 2000-158376 A (BL Ototekku Kabushiki Kaisha), 13 June, 2000 (13.06.00), Claims; Fig. 2 (Family: none)	1-8												
X A	JP 5-266957 A (Hitachi Medical Corp.), 15 October, 1993 (15.10.93), Page 3, column 3, lines 2 to 49; Fig. 2 (Family: none)	3,5 1,2,4,6-8												
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.														
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed														
Date of the actual completion of the international search 23 April, 2002 (23.04.02)	Date of mailing of the international search report 21 May, 2002 (21.05.02)													
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Japanese Patent Office	Authorized officer													
Facsimile No.	Telephone No.													

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/JP02/00673

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	JP 10-94221 A (Toshiba Corp.), 10 April, 1998 (10.04.98), Par. Nos. [0027] to [0028]; Fig. 10 (Family: none)	3,5
A	JP 10-223346 A (Kabushiki Kaisha Soruton), 21 August, 1998 (21.08.98), Full text; Fig. 9 (Family: none)	1,2,4,6-8
A	US 5575664 A (Hughes Aircraft Co.), 19 November, 1996 (19.11.96), Full text; Fig. 1 & JP 9-102376 A & DE 69603129 C & AU 673651 A & CA 2176049 A & EP 746065 A & KR 211274 B	1-8
A	US 6089875 A (Star Micronics Co.), 18 July, 2000 (18.07.00), Full text; Fig. 1 & JP 11-329653 A	1-8

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